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CONCEPTUALIZING LEARNING AND ADAPTATION FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

This paper draws from a research that provided a conceptual framework to facilitate a process of theorising about learning, adaptation, consultation, involvement, patterns of relationships and seeking a stable operating structure for engaging people in building their own realities. The focus of the paper is on how South Africa can achieve sustainable societal transformation through learning and adaptation of the experiences of other successful nations in order to

eradicate the socio-economic challenges faced by the majority of its people. The paper seeks to highlight the importance of active citizenry in the effective implementation of policies.

The methodology is descriptive and involves content analysis of the multiple cases of Brazil (as a parallel to South Africa) from 2003 at the inauguration of former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to the end of his term in December 2010. The centrepiece of his integrated effort were social projects to eradicate hunger and poverty in Brazil. The second case is on Sweden (as an example of an egalitarian state). The process involved a detailed and systematic examination of contents of a particular body of material for the purposes of identifying patterns, themes, biases and grouping the data into pre-determined categories.

This paper conceptualises learning and adaptation as an intervention to devise suitable and effective social structures that could enhance South African societal transformation. Learning and adaptation is achieved by systemically learning from others and adapting to the internal and prevailing external environment without losing the social system's identity. The conclusion drawn is that responsible and adaptive leadership is pivotal to societal transformation, when the leaders are able to design suitable social structures of how to involve people in the sustainable societal transformation process.

Key words: Learning and adaptation, collective learning, active citizenry, consultation, implementation, societal transformation.

1.0 Introduction

Globalisation and its complexities cause fluctuations in economies that require swift adaptation through learning from each other's experiences. Dawson (2007, p.3) discusses the urgent need for a "new global morality which is centred on the adaptation of mankind as a global system." The interconnectedness and interdependences of the world economy is pushing for a collective view to the sustainable future of the world. The leadership orientation is also faced with a challenge to be responsive to wider stakeholder needs and demands. Some nations have progressively attained competitive levels that are taking care of the needs and aspirations of their people whilst some especially on the African continent are lagging behind. Based on the Global Competitive Index report (2018) the highly competitive country in Africa, Mauritius, is pegged at number 49 based on the world standards.

South Africa is ranked 67th and it is the fifth member of BRICS, a group that comprises of Brazil, Russia, India and China and is focussed on advancing more inclusive and equal growth

within their socio-economic policies. This places South Africa in a strategic position to be able to learn and adapt the experiences of the group members. Yet, the perpetual triple challenges of unemployment, inequality, poverty together with corruption, poor education, poor health, and poor service provision and recently state capture, remain problematic in South Africa. The numerous service delivery protests are an indication that the civil society is pushing for change. In 2016 more than 30 protests were recorded per day and all these were attributed to a leadership crisis across the nation. Using principles and practices gleaned from organisational and other systemic analysis metrics, an assessment and analysis of the competitiveness of South Africa, Brazil and Sweden was done with a view of exposing the points of departure, and then highlighting the best practice that South Africa can learn from and adapt to inform her socio-economic policies.

The objective of this paper is to conceptualise learning and adaptation for the South Africa social system exploring whether learning and adaptation of experiences of progressive nations could be of value in the sustainable improvement of the general welfare of South Africans.

2. Background

South Africa is faced with socio-economic challenges which, include unemployment that surged to 27,6% in the first quarter of 2019, the poverty level that is seemingly going down is pegged at 45,5% which translates to twenty-three million people living below the upper band of poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Whilst the poverty situation is seemingly improving, on one hand, inequality remains problematic on the other hand with a Gini-coefficient of 0,65 based on expenditure data (Statistics South Africa, 2018) making it one of the highest in the world (Kiersz, 2014). According to Barros and Gupta (2017) inequality impacts negatively on socio-political stability and economic development of South Africa. The GCI persistently show poor performance for South Africa at a micro-level.

In comparison, Brazil, with a population 209 million had its Gini coefficient fell in 2003 during the reign of former president Lula from 0.58 to 0.54 (OECD, 2010). The Gini-coefficient measures the level of inequality with 0 indicating total equality and 1 total inequality. Gini coefficient for Brazil has been on a steep descent since 2000 and the social public policies were responsible for reducing inequality by 7% from 2003 to 2009 (OECD, 2010). Brazil has a poverty rate of 29.7% (Kleiman, 2011). Unemployment in Brazil is 12, 3%. Although the Brazilian economy has shrunk from its peak of 2012, with the social programmes, which sustains millions of its population are under threat due to reduced funding, this paper, seeks to

re-assess the period between 2003 and 2012 when Brazil experienced economic boom. Sweden belongs to the group of most equal OECD countries despite the rapid surge of income inequality (OECD, 2015).

Other BRICS countries all have single digit unemployment rates. The BRICS five nations have a combined GDP that is equivalent to 20% of the gross world product (BRICS Wikipedia, 2016). South African statistics posts a contradictory picture in comparison with the other BRICs members, yet this association presents a very favourable learning position for South Africa. Learning in its purest form informs, enriches and raises consciousness levels in individuals as well as in collectives.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Learning

Learning is a result of the experienced response (operant view of learning) and vicariously, through observing the effects of the social environment on other peoples' behaviour (Chowdhury, 2006). It is facilitated by suitable social structure that conforms to the traditions and norms of the particular society; otherwise, it could be copying and pasting other people's behaviour (Toendepi, 2013). This is achieved collectively, Cundill (2010) or individually in the psychological perspective according to Bandura (1991) and results in social change, development and transformation. Collien (2018, p.134) concurs that learning is a collective, "embodied and embedded process that is practice-based." Collien (2018) describes learning as a way of being in the social world and is composed of individual and collective identities. Reiners (2019) quotes Hall (1993:2718) defining learning as conventional and occurring when people assimilate new information.

The information is usually based on experience and applied to subsequent actions (Reiners, 2019). However, Mostert, Pahl-Wostl, Rees, Searle, Tabara and Tippett (2007) indicate how the concept of social learning is often confused with the conditions or methods necessary to facilitate social learning such as stakeholder participation and involvement. Reiner (2019) also discusses paradigm change as occurring when target hierarchies change or when existing paradigm becomes obsolete or less suitable for the aspired development. Most importantly to note is that learning is triggered when programs fail (Reiners, 2019). The concept of change has in some way been included in almost all-learning theory. Dahlgaard-Park (2006) discusses change as having a dichotomous behaviour because not all change is desirable change, it could be positive or negative.

Learning and education are understood and defined as a continuous reconstruction of experience, through which the world is continuously re-perceived and through which individuals realise themselves as being in an ongoing process of growth (Dahlgaard-Park 2006). The acquisition of knowledge is hardly distinguishable from learning (Colien, 2018). Ramsey (2014) refers to the same process as knowing. Therefore, learning, knowledge and knowing are concepts that overlap. Pavlidis (2015) argues that collective transformation and collective shaping of reality are acts associated with the acquisition of knowledge and that education makes people capable of adapting their understanding of change in their world.

Importantly in this paper is the process of policy learning, highlighted by Reiners (2019, p.39) as a change in political knowledge, skills and attitudes that are brought about by new information. According to Reiners (2019, p.41) policy transfer “is a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions in one time/or place is used in the development in another time/place.” Policy learning can be voluntary (Rose (1993) or both voluntary (Reiners, 2019). South Africa can only voluntarily do policy learning and policy transfer and adapt such policies for the home environment. There may not be a direct fit of these policies and procedures as they were designed for particular circumstances and time. In the Brazilian case, there is a realisation that the needs of urban and rural people differed and specific sets of interventions for each case were designed (OECD, 2010).

Pressures from socio-economic challenges usually foster the need to learn. Availability of new information facilitates the learning (Rose, 1993). It maybe that the South African politics is not fully aware of the successes in the Brazilian and the Swedish models. However, Reiners (2019) specifically pointed out that public administration controls the transformation of any state, and hence the leadership should learn about others’ successes in policy development and implementation first. Reiners (2019, p.37) also discussed “political administrative learning” because the sub-systems of politics and administration cannot be separated. The leaders learn for the whole nation and are responsible for engaging the general populous on the suitable pathways for sustainable developmental. Reiners (2019) points out that quality public administration has a positive influence on the transformation process. Colien (2018) discusses the impact of power in organisational learning, which also affects public learning, policy learning and policy transfer. There has to be political will to learn and adapt others’ policies. Power hinders the learning process, yet, it also enables learning (Colien, 2018).

South Africa is a society in learning as it is a new democracy; it should be open to policy learning and policy transfer. Edwards (1997) describes a learning society as a learning market, which enables institutions to provide services for individuals as a condition for supporting the competitiveness of the economy. A learning society has to be educated, committed to active citizenship, be a liberal democracy and offers equal opportunities to its citizens (Edwards, 1997). Societies transform themselves through their internal processes responding to the external environmental forces (Toendepi, 2013). Cundill (2010) pointed out that societal learning is facilitated by the willingness of participants to listen to alternative viewpoints. Social learning is however, aligned loosely to a structure and it is semi-formal.

3.2 Adaptation

This paper seeks to advance the proposal that learning and adaptation, just like in social learning takes place when there are suitable and effective social structures that embrace democratic processes to engaging society. Wang (2010) state that it is the continuous enforcement of adaptive processes such as higher order learning that generates new knowledge. Hence, complex adaptive systems constantly seek to adapt to the changing environment and have the capacity to operate in all conditions (Xiang-yu & Xiang-yang, 2007).

Adaptation is a process in which a species becomes suited for its habitat by acquiring new ways of action (Pikkarainen, 2018; Kull, 2014). Due to the global complexities and the varied political agendas, most economies are subjected to drastic fluctuations, which require adaptation in order to cope. Adapting to the new environment requires learning of the new ways suitable for current environment (Pikkarainen, 2018). Human systems are capable of producing adaptive incremental changes as well as discontinuous radical change (Xiang-yu & Xiang-yang, 2007). In order to survive in the competitive market environment, governments and organisations have been striving to improve their flexibility and agility to adapt to the fast changes of the internal and external environment, in order to maintain their competitive advantage (Zhang, 2008). This calls for the need to integrate business management and leadership processes to combine them as a unified system in order to remain competitive at any level. An adaption strategy can pave a way forward for South Africa as it imports foreign experiences from Brazil and Sweden as cited in the case data.

3.3 Leadership role in social learning and adaptation

Northouse (2018) stipulate four components of leadership as process, influence, involving the collective and that leadership is centred on the achievement of common goals. It is the responsibility of leaders to align, motivate, and inspire people to invest or buy in the alternative approaches and thereby build broader support for change. Leaders will rely on the integration of scientific and local knowledge in designing suitable structures and there are alternative options of modelling other leaders who guided successful transformation (Toendepi, 2013). The then President of Brazil (Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva) visualised the relatedness of food production, consumption and distribution and communicated his vision and life's mission fulfilment of "seeing every Brazilian having three meals a day by the end of his administration." The Swedish social system focuses on egalitarianism which is the guarantee of equality for each person to develop to his/her fullest potential (OECD, 2011).

In the General Systems Theory (GST) (Dawson, 2007) leadership came out as one of the outstanding fields along with people, knowledge, habitat, time and rules. The fundamental job of a leader is to establish a clear vision for people, and to formulate a strategy and an action plan so that people know what is expected of them in the achievement of the vision. Transformation occurs when leaders focus on the structure of how to gather participants and the context in which the gatherings take place (Toendepi, 2013; Block, 2008).

The complexity of leaders is emanating from how the leaders should deal effectively with the chronic poverty, inequality, unemployment and diseases and still attain sustainable development (Mirvis, DeJongh, Googins, Quin & Van Velsor, 2010). The United Nations (UN) (1987, p.5) define sustainable development as "development that meets the presents needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." Hence, the emergence of responsible leadership theory that demands value-based and ethical principles driven by concrete and morally sound relationships broader stakeholders' perspectives (Paraschiv, Nemoiana, Langa & Szobo, 2012; Mirvis, *et al.*, 2010). Mirvis et al (2010) further elaborate that adaptive processes that involve society, organisations and individuals shape responsive leadership. Responsible leadership is an adaptive process because it addresses emergent realities emanating from the interdependent global world.

3.4 Adaptive leadership

Adaptive leadership is about how leaders "encourage people to adapt or face and deal with problem, challenges and change" (Northouse, 2018, p.257). The centrepiece of adaptive leadership is dealing with change. The South Africa public leadership will have to convince

civil society that the policy learning and policy transfer from other geographic locations is of benefit based on the success stories in the case data. The whole essence of adaptive leadership is challenging people to deal with difficult challenges by providing them with opportunities and space to learn new ways of doing things (Northouse, 2018), hence it is follower centred. Adaptive leadership calls on to the leaders to “get onto the balcony” (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p.132) to be able to see what is really happening and get a clear view of the challenges. The South Africa leadership should get onto the balcony, learn from others experiences, and adapt those for the home environment. Northouse (2018) presents the advantages of adaptive leadership as being people centred, interactive process and that it underscores that leadership is a complex transaction that happens between leaders and followers.

4. Method

The primary concern of this paper was to conceptualise learning and adaptation of the experiences of other nations for the South African social system. The paper draws from the findings of the main research that developed a conceptual framework to facilitate a process of theorising about learning and adaptation. The main research was a qualitative inquiry that adopted Grounded Theory as a methodology. Grounded theory was chosen for its strength in integrating data from various methods. The multi-method approach encompassed semi-structured interviews, three focus groups, participant observation and document analysis on the multiple cases of Brazil and Sweden and still adhered to the Grounded Theory principles by (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This paper dwells only on the findings from document analysis, which involved systematic evaluation of documents using the analytical procedures of content analysis (Bowen, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2008) stressed that document analysis requires extensive data examination and interpretation in order to gain elicited meaning crucial in knowledge development. The combination of document analysis with other qualitative methods is not unique it is often referred to as “method triangulation” which is a combination of methods in a study.

Grimmer and Stewart (2013) concur with Schreier (2012) that content analysis procedures are a systematic and objective in analysing large scale texts by means of describing and quantifying phenomenon. Hofmann and King (2010) argues that the number of documents that can be analysed depends on the specific application of interest. Bowen (2009) notes that documents

of all types are relevant in assisting the researcher uncover meaning and insights on the research problem.

Data from content analysis was grouped into pre-determined categories that matched those that had emerged from the primary collection method of interviews. Stemler (2001) described such an approach as “priori coding”, Bowen (2009) agrees, and states that pre-defined categories may be used when the content analysis is to supplement other research methods. The selection of the documents purely depended on the issues that were being explored. In the research, relevance, authenticity and credibility of the documents was ensued as most of the documents were obtained from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) online library, where access was granted for scholarly purposes. More documents were from Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the researcher visited the embassies of the two nations in Pretoria where other materials were collected.

The documents obtained from OECD and analysed included the social policy documents, Reviews of evaluations and assessments in education, Brazil economic policy, key challenges for Swedish economy, Economic surveys for South Africa, Assessing scientific reading, mathematics literacy, Employment protection regulations and Labour Market performances, Sources of economic growth for OECD countries and International Monetary Fund assessments.

All issues in the selected material were considered fully in order to boast their representation as a sample. Relevant and comparable properties from the content were grouped into pre-determined categories. There were 27 pre-determined categories from the main research, which included leadership, politics, economic growth, inequalities, poverty, employment, education, health, culture, social policy, foreign policy, agriculture and rural development, gender equality, technology and labour issues.

5. Findings

5.1 Brazil

The research looked closely at Brazil from the inauguration of the then President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to the end of his term in 2010. The centrepiece of his integrated effort was the Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) Strategy. The Zero Hunger Strategy combined short-term responses

to emergence situations and long-term responses that helped in creating the necessary conditions for families to guarantee their own food security (FAO, 2009).

Category 1: Inequalities

From 2004-2006 Brazil reduce its undernourished population from 17 million to 11.9 million, through the Zero Hunger Strategy, launched in January 2003 by the then inaugurated Lula Administration. In the midst of the economic crisis, Brazil sustained internal consumption in part because of cash transfer programmes and Government support to family farms (FAO, 2008). Other actions that were part of the Zero Strategy, included school transfers and family grants. The Zero Hunger strategy recognised that the needs of people living in rural and urban areas differed and offered specific sets of interventions. The strategy was a new economic development model that is more inclusive and it gave opportunities to all citizens to contribute and benefit.

“If structural changes were not made to reduce social exclusion and concentration (income, land etc), thereby breaking the vicious circle linking social exclusion to poverty and hunger, the food security policy would not have succeeded” (Embassy of Brazil 2011).

Over ten ministries were involved in the strategy that had 30 programs and initiatives falling into four main areas of intervention, which, were access to food, strengthening of family farming, income generation and social empowerment, mobilisation and oversight. The multi-sectoral approach where the state, municipalities, civil society and the private sector all participated brought about rapid and significant decrease in the levels of poverty and hunger. The combined effort made the strategy take a centre stage as a permanent priority of the country and a transformation beyond the Lula administration. This approach also allowed the focus on the hunger to reshape the role of state and society in tackling the country's longstanding social and economic challenges.

The Lula administration had made it clear from the very start that fighting hunger was its top priority. In his inaugural speech on 1 January 2003, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva stated that he would consider his life's mission fulfilled if every Brazilian was able to have three meals a day by the end of his administration.

“This is a cause that could and should belong to everyone, without distinction of class, party or ideology,” the new President said, calling upon all elements of Brazilian society to embrace.

The Zero Hunger strategy focussed on the eradication of hunger and malnutrition, which needed to be the top priority of the political agenda and be a shared commitment backed by action.

“Hopefully in looking at how the Zero Hunger strategy was designed and implemented other countries will find a valuable source to draw from and adapt or take into consideration when tackling these same challenges” (FAO, 2009).

The inability of most Governments to deal effectively with hunger and malnutrition is caused by a wide range of factors, which include lack of political will, institutional and legal framework to promote food security, insufficient resources to invest in food security and agriculture, social and political instability and climatic changes (FAO, 2009). In many developing countries, employment and wages remain below their pre-2008 economic crisis levels.

“In the current situation the poor are hit doubly hard since they must pay more for food while their purchasing power dwindles due to the economic crisis” (FAO, 2008).

Gini coefficient of income concentration of Brazil is 0.51 (World Bank, 2014) had a steep descent since 2000. The social public policies were responsible for reducing inequality by 7% from 2003 to 2009 (OECD, 2010). Brazil has a poverty rate of 29.7% (Kleiman, 2011). Brazil still has one of the highest rates among the OECD countries, which means income distribution is still highly unequal.

Category 2: Social Welfare

Brazil introduced the Food Card as a cash transfer programme for the Zero Hunger Strategy. Initially introduced to the two municipalities in the state of Piaui, (Guaribas and Acaua) which are in the drought stricken region. The primary beneficiaries were women and the Food Cards were exclusively for purchasing food and were valid for six months, which could be extended if the socio-economic and nutritional conditions of the household did not improve. The Food Card programme benefited 1.9 million households. The School Grant is a conditional cash transfer programme that provides financial assistance to Brazil's poor and extremely poor households, provided certain education, welfare and health related conditions are met.

“As of September 2009, 12.4 million families received the grants” (Embassy of Brazil, 2011).

The programme has remained formulated around three dimensions of fighting hunger, poverty and inequality, which involved:

- *“The promotion of immediate relief of poverty through direct cash transfers to households, provided certain conditions are met;*
- *The strengthening of basic social rights, such as access to health and education which will help families break the intergenerational cycle of poverty; and*
- *The linkage to programmes which aim to enable families that receive the Family Grant to overcome their condition of vulnerability and poverty...”* OECD, 2011

The Family Grant was said to have assisted 48 million people throughout the country (FAO, 2009). Its major outcomes include:

- *“The reduction in income inequality: where the income of the bottom 10% grew six times faster than the top 10%; and*
- *Reduction of poverty: the poverty index fell from 42.7% to 28.8% and extreme poverty from 12% to 4.8%, hence the Gini coefficient also fell during the same period (between 2003 and 2009) from 0.581 to 0.544”* (OECD, 2010).

Businesses also participated in a programme referred to as “good karma marketing” which played a very important role in the public’s perception of the actions undertaken by Government to unite sectors in the fight against hunger. Labour Unions too contributed greatly towards the mobilisation of society in support of the programmes. Churches and philanthropic organisations formed an extensive network of institutions that provided the valuable social resources also needed for the implementation of the programme. The participation by non-governmental organisations played a pivotal role in preventing private interest groups from thwarting the efforts of Government (FAO, 2009).

Category 3: Economic Growth

According to FAO (2009) economic growth helped to explain overall progress in terms of reducing extreme poverty and hunger in Latin America until 2006. The new jobs created as a result of this economic growth increased employment opportunities and more tax revenues, which spurred greater social spending. The region’s problem was essentially pointed out as a lack of access to food and not as lack of production of food.

“A significant portion of the population did not have the money it needed to buy food”
(Embassy of Brazil, 2011).

The food security policies of Brazil encompassed the interrelationship between food production, distribution and consumption whereas the cash transfer policies are confined to consumption only.

“The perpetuation of hunger is a perpetuation of the vicious circle of exclusion” (WFP, 2009)

The Zero Hunger strategy successfully transformed vicious cycles of exclusion into virtuous cycles of inclusion through coordinated and integrated action. FAO (2008) noted that hunger could not be overcome solely by distributing free food. Food security policies have to be linked to economic and social development strategies helping to promote growth with income distribution and more and better jobs. If an economic development model contributes to the concentration of resources (financial, natural) and does not successfully reduce unemployment and provide better wages, the vicious cycle of exclusion, hunger and poverty perpetuates themselves.

The Zero Hunger Strategy is an example of an economic development model with twin tracks of assisting the needy and promoting social inclusion. Based on the Zero Hunger Strategy the relationship between the three dimensions of food production, distribution and consumption was governed at 3 levels:

- *“National-level: structural policies coordinated by central government to address the primary causes of hunger and poverty (WFP 2009). Such policies included employment generation, income generation, the promotion of family farms, and agrarian reform among others;*
- *Local level policies: where there was a decentralised local system implemented to ensure for food security which enhanced social participation” (FAO, 2009).*

According to FAO (2009) the experience in Brazil indicates that the institutional framework of a food and nutrition security policy should involve at least four elements of:

- *“A participatory approach to policy making;*
- *Performance monitoring, institutional arrangements to make the implementation of policies feasible, including executive institutions and advisory bodies such as councils at central and decentralised levels;*
- *A coordinating institution answering directly to the head of Government; and*
- *A right to food approach guaranteed by a legal framework that also ensures the sustainability of key programs” (FAO, 2009).*

Category 4: Education

Brazil has approximately 34.6 million students that consume fresh and nutritional food free from Monday to Friday at public schools (FAO, 2009). All students in the public system, from pre-school, primary, high school, technical, and adult literacy programs were included in this (FAO, 2009). Bolsa Familia also has an in-road to education in that one of the conditionalities

stipulates that from an education perspective a minimum school attendance frequency of 85% for children aged 6 to 15 years and minimum of 75% teenagers from 16 to 17 years has to be attained. With respect to social assistance, a minimum frequency of 85% of the socio-educative services to children and adolescence until 15 years of age in risk or recovered from child forced labour is expected (FAO, 2008). Both the families and the public system are responsible for fulfilment of BF's conditionalities. The objective of the conditionalities were not to punish families but to ensure compliance and commitment from both the beneficiaries and the public system.

Sweden

Category 1: Inequalities

The success story of a welfare state in Sweden is the equitable income distribution and high standards in the general welfare of its people. The Nordic nations altogether have the narrowest gap between the incomes of the top 10% of the population and lowest 10% (OECD, 2010). Sweden is a laboratory of social experiments, implementing series of reforms, many of which are emulated in the world. The Gini coefficient for Sweden is one of the lowest in the OECD group (OECD, 2010).

"Today Sweden remains a mature welfare state" (Swedish Embassy, 2011).

The consequence of large-tax financed systems has been a society with narrower economic gaps between the social classes than in comparable countries within Western Europe. The classic welfare state has been referred to internationally as the "middle way," the "third way," or the "Swedish model." The latter expression originally described the centralised negotiations between Swedish employers and the country's strong unions, which secured crucial stability in the labour market for several decades as the welfare state expanded (Swedish Institute, 2009).

Category 2: Welfare State

The prosperity that Sweden built was and still is distributed amongst the population in the form of large tax financed systems of education, health, child and elderly pensions, parental insurances, social grants and various general allowances.

"The fruits of success were distributed among the population through generous public social welfare systems that gave the population heavily subsidised schooling, health care and child and elderly care" (Swedish Institute, 2005).

Sweden is a model country for the rights of women, children and vulnerable population groups. Because of this social welfare policy, it is one of the world's countries with the heaviest tax burden. Sweden is one of the countries with the highest average life expectancy and living standards in the world. Life expectancy rates are 78.4 years for men and 82.7 for women, labour force participation is 80% for men and 76% for women (Facts About Sweden, 2011).

Category 3: Economic Growth

In recent years, Swedish corporations have struggled with difficulties partly due to globalised markets and stiff competition. Initially cited as a problem, was that foreign owners have acquired many Swedish flagship companies like Volvo, Astra, Pharmacia and ASEA (OECD, 2009). Others have taken a positive view to seeing it as a natural consequence of globalisation and as proof that Swedish companies are competitive and attractive. This effect has since been balanced by Swedish acquisition of companies in other countries.

The Swedish economic model received international attention for its ability to combine growth-oriented policies, openness to globalisation and structural change with social cohesion. The domestic product market regulation is relatively liberal compared to other western European countries (OECD, 2010). Sweden exerts the lowest state control and fewer legal barriers to competition than other European countries. Comparatively low levels of corruption and high levels of trust also underpin the effective functioning of markets and contribute to a sound business environment. With a market oriented regulatory environment and a skilled labour force, Sweden ranks high in broad surveys of overall competitiveness.

Category 4: Education

Schooling is free, in other words tax financed not only in the nine year compulsory school and the three year upper secondary school but also at University and college level, where government offers study loans so that young people from all social classes can afford to study. Sweden currently leads in the EU statistics measuring equality in its political and education systems. Almost all men and women in Sweden are either gainfully employed or studying.

“Unemployed women receive an unemployment benefit even if the husband is a millionaire” (Swedish Institute, 2009).

Students who fail to qualify for senior school can have individual programmes tailored to their needs. The aim is for these students to be able to transfer eventually to one of the national programmes. Students with intellectual disabilities are offered a special programme. The

performance of Swedish education system is monitored by a range of tools including participation in international assessments, thematic quality evaluation by the Inspectorate and evaluation reports by the National Agency of Education (OECD, 2011). The Swedish system of education combines national standard setting and central test development with a high degree of trust in school professionals to carry out evaluation and assessment. All educational activities are organised around a system of management by objectives (MOB) where each level of the education system i.e. is national agencies, municipalities and schools engage in evaluation activities. At a central level, there is high degree of transparency in measuring and publishing results on goal achievement.

The major strength of the Swedish evaluation and assessment framework of education is its clear focus on outcomes, “an outcome oriented framework” (OECD, 2011). Teachers are seen as experts not only in instructing but also, in assessing their students (OECD, 2009). Teachers play a pivotal role in the internal evaluation of their own schools. Teachers, have conceived quality assurance and reporting within the school as a collective process with a strong focus and democratic participation and ownership (OECD, 2009). Sweden is one of the earliest supporters of international benchmarks of standards of performance in core areas such as mathematics and science.

“The Swedish ministry has a policy that prioritises the use of research results to inform better practices in schools” (Swedish Embassy, 2011).

By international standards education attainment is high in Sweden. Over 90% of the young cohorts have completed upper secondary education and share among the highest rated in the OECD countries. Even though Sweden has the highest education attainments, they still strive to improve the system to reduce the youth unemployment rate and improve productivity through privatisation. Several studies showed that higher education levels have been an important contributor to Swedish GDP growth over many years now (OECD, 2011).

6. Discussion

The Brazilian economic model’s main characteristics include structural changes that embrace inclusivity, a multi sectoral approach, societal engagement and participation. The Swedish economic model received international attention for its ability to combine growth-oriented policies and structural changes with social cohesion. In the Swedish social structure, consensus, accountability and trust are pivotal. The system is sensitive to human needs as it recognises the rights of women, children and the vulnerable within the population. Communication is also in

all directions and the society is educated enough to be able to voice and articulate their challenges.

Government of South Africa, as a learning system learns for society through political administrative learning, policy learning and policy transfer. Policy learning refers to a change in political knowledge, skills and attitudes brought about by new information (Reiners, 2019). The critical element in policy learning is political will to learn as well as to initiate policy transfer (Reiners, 2019). The “Lula moments” are a demonstration of political will to transform the nation through the eradication of hunger. It became a collective vision with multi-sectoral approach where the state, municipalities, civil society and the private sector all participated brought about rapid and significant decrease in the levels of poverty and hunger (Kleiman, 2011). The combined effort made the strategy take a centre stage as a permanent priority of the Brazilian nation and a transformation beyond the Lula administration.

The Brazilian social structure is people centred, consultative and encapsulated a goal-oriented philosophy, like the eradication of hunger. The people define the challenges, participated in devising solutions and the implementation of such. The strategy was understood from the bottom-up and horizontally across sectors as well as from private and non-governmental environs. Once the processes and procedures within a social system are effectively interrelated and engaging, buy-in and participation by people becomes a non-negotiable (Toendepi, 2013).

Policy transfer “is a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in one place is used in the development in another place” (Reiner, 2019, p.41). As a BRICS member, South Africa is privy to all the success stories of the other group members, thereby presented with an opportunity to learn and adapt. However, that responsibility lies with the leadership who firstly need to design suitable social structures of involvement (Toendepi, 2013), and secondly must mobilise broad support for change and maintain the momentum needed to navigate the transition (Olsson, *et al.*, 2006). Where leaders are insensitive to learning they become cogs in the social system (Dawson, 2007). Hence, responsible leaders who are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of a broader stakeholder perspective (Mirvis, *et al.*, 2012; Paraschiv, *et al.*, 2012) will successfully lead sustainable change (Toendepi & Viljoen, 2019).

The progressiveness of Brazil in dealing with the socio-economic challenges is in the structural changes that were effected. The realisation by the then President Lula, that the society had to be central in tackling their own challenges, became the basis of the new social structure. The

Brazilian society owns the Zero Hunger model and made it a success because it was developed for their own benefit. However, the Brazilian social structure still has some elements similar to the South African hierarchical structure; although it has effective collaboration and sharing of knowledge. The Brazilian structure sold and invited people to participate in decision making thereby transferring the strategy from the top to the people and to all sectors of the economy.

The Swedish economic model received international attention for its ability to combine growth-oriented policies and structural changes with social cohesion. The system has comparatively lower levels of corruption and higher levels of trust and accountability. According to OEDC (2010), deregulation, globalisation and technology sectors have been the key productivity drivers for Sweden. The Swedish social structure has communication in all directions and its society occupies the centre. The social structure regards people as a source of knowledge and experience. Such a social structure is participatory, flexible and enhances accountability, transparency and efficiency. Senge (1990) notes how participatory approaches view change as a joint process that can only be realised when all actors are brought together. The Swedish management system is a social sharing circle of equals where all pull together for the group while developing their human potential and heightening their awareness because of their inclusive nature (OECD, 2008).

8. Conclusion

There are significant lessons that the South African social system can learn and adapt from the experiences of both Brazil and Sweden in terms of changing the social structure to enable public participation, inter-sectoral integration, collaboration, accountability, trust and improvement in the quality of education and other public systems. South Africa requires leadership that is responsive to the needs of the collective and involves the people in devising and implementing suitable solutions.

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